

# Challenging Bourdieu's Theory: Dialogic Interaction as a Means to Provide Access to Highbrow Culture for All

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Elisabeth Torras-Gómez<sup>1</sup> , Laura Ruiz-Eugenio<sup>1</sup> ,  
Teresa Sordé-Martí<sup>2</sup>, and Elena Duque<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

According to Bourdieu, class position is related to cultural capital, taste, and preferences. Accordingly, the author states that, because of their “habitus,” those from high social classes have higher cultural capital and preferences for highbrow culture, which gives them more chances to succeed in life. On the contrary, those from low social classes have lower cultural capital because of their lowbrow cultural preferences, which makes it more difficult for them to achieve in a system that favors the dominant classes. Through the review of articles on Dialogic Literary Gatherings published in peer-reviewed journals, this article aims to provide more insights on how the principles of dialogic learning occur. The results of the review challenge Bourdieu's concept of “habitus,” providing evidence of how socioeconomic status (SES) is not determinant to cultural capital.

## Keywords

dialogic literary gatherings, habitus, literary classics, overcoming inequalities, SES

## Introduction

Bourdieu's work has been widely studied. Although the reproductionist character of some of his concepts and theories have been the focus for a large part of the critiques of his work, there is no consensus on the extent to which concepts such as the “habitus” or the role of the educational system as a reproducer of inequalities are still valid in today's societies. King (2000), in “Thinking With Bourdieu Against Bourdieu,” goes further in exploring the complexity of this controversy. Although concepts such as “habitus” have an important structuralist limitation, he argues that Bourdieu points at certain moments with lucidity toward overcoming the dualism of objectivism-subjectivism and agency-structure.

However, in “In Other Words: Essays Toward a Reflective Sociology” (1987), Bourdieu acknowledges that some of his theory was mainly structuralist. He explains that it was not after he read Gramsci that his positions began to shift toward new conceptions. At the time of his previous publications (Bourdieu, 1979; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970), his theory included two main concepts. The first one is “habitus,” which defines and is defined by each class' tastes and lifestyles. Accordingly, those who belong to the elite have higher cultural capital than those from low social classes as they have a natural preference for highbrow culture because they are socialized in it from a very young age. The second idea is the role of the educational system as a reproducer of inequalities.

Following his approach, schools systematically reward the knowledge and behavior mainly mastered by the elite because of their socialization in it from an early age, while pretending that achievement is based on merits.

This Bourdieusian reproductionist theory (Bourdieu, 1979; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970) has highly influenced research on taste and school achievement. Even if the concept of cultural capital is still unclear (P. L. Andersen & Hansen, 2012; Davies & Rizk, 2018; Kingston, 2001; Lareau & Weininger, 2003), many have studied the correlation between it and socioeconomic status (SES). Some of them demonstrate a positive correlation between parental social class, cultural capital, and children's participation in cultural activities and tastes (Kraaykamp & Van Eijck, 2010; Sullivan, 2001; Xu & Hampden-Thompson, 2012). By contrast, others find that students from low cultural capital households can benefit from cultural capital acquisition even more than those from high cultural capital households (I. G. Andersen & Jæger, 2015; DiMaggio, 1982; DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985;

<sup>1</sup>University of Barcelona, Spain

<sup>2</sup>Autonomous University of Barcelona, Spain

## Corresponding Author:

Laura Ruiz-Eugenio, Department of Theory and History of Education, University of Barcelona, Passeig de la Vall d'Hebron, 171, Barcelona 08035, Spain.

Email: lauraruizeugenio@ub.edu



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Gofen, 2009; Kingston, 2001). This would contradict the structuralist equation of Higher social class = Higher cultural capital = Higher academic success.

Regarding taste and cultural preferences associated with individuals in each SES, studies show an overall decline in interest toward highbrow culture (Gripsrud et al., 2011; Purhonen et al., 2011; Van Eijck & Knulst, 2005), but not as strong for humanities students (Gripsrud et al., 2011) or women (Purhonen et al., 2011), which sets the focus on the role of education in highbrow culture socialization. In this article, we understand highbrow culture as defined in the scientific literature published in peer review indexed journals that provide evidence on studies of population cultural preference in different societies. Among these studies, those already referenced identify highbrow culture as “legitimate culture,” like international classic literature, painting, or classical music, among other genres (Gripsrud et al., 2011; Purhonen et al., 2011; Van Eijck & Knulst, 2005). The different classifications of highbrow culture are not free of biases such as the one elaborated by Peterson and Kern (1996).

The question that still remains open is how cultural and educational practices counteract the link between social class and taste for everyone to interact with, and benefit from, legitimate culture. Therefore, this article aims to revise the relation between social class and taste presented and discussed in Bourdieusian productions (Bourdieu, 1979; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970). For that purpose, first, we analyze Bourdieu’s cultural reproduction model against the mobility model and against the trends in taste and preferences related to each SES. Second, the dialogic learning conception is examined as a framework in which Bourdieusian tenets are challenged. In this scenario, the case of Dialogic Literary Gatherings (DLG) emerges as a tool to both democratize access to highbrow culture and foster social transformation through interaction for the individuals who participate in it and their entourage (Lopez de Aguilera, 2019).

## The Cultural Reproduction Theory Versus the Cultural Mobility Theory

Cultural preferences have largely been associated with social class. Bourdieu (1979) developed the concept of “habitus,” which refers to the framework that shapes an individual’s behavior in the different “fields” in which he participates. The habitus is defined by a composition of the individual’s economic capital (possessions), social capital (connections), and cultural capital (cultivation). Accordingly, the preponderance of each of these capital forms is what establishes the boundaries between each social class and a stratification within them. Due to its composition, the habitus is mainly transmitted by the family from an early age, but also by the school system in “differentiated” societies as it depends on the context in which the socialization process takes place.

Regarding the concept of cultural capital, Bourdieu (1986) explains that it exists in three states: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized. The *embodied state* is the cultural capital that an individual builds throughout his life through his own cultivation and becomes a part of himself. This process starts at an early age, requires time and personal effort, and it highly depends on the family’s cultural capital. The *objectified state* is related to the cultural belongings an individual has, which depends on his family’s capacity to have them (economic capital) and on his personal ability to access them (embodied cultural capital). The *institutionalized state* relies on the institutional recognition of a certain cultural capital, which gives monetary value to such capital and cultural value to the individual who possesses it. Therefore, the author indicates that because the schooling system assumes a certain cultural capital for all students, it is easier for students with higher cultural capital to succeed, whereas lower class students possess less cultural capital and are less capable of benefiting from it. However, he also concludes that because this fact is overseen by the system and its participants, academic results are presented as meritocratic and, thus, cultural capital becomes a tool for the elite to reproduce inequalities (Bourdieu, 1986).

Despite Bourdieu’s (1987) categorization of his initial theory as structuralist, in the past decades to the present time, many are the researchers who have studied social reality from this perspective and found consistent results with its propositions, together with some controversies. Davies and Rizk (2018) examine the evolution of the concept of cultural capital in American educational research since Bourdieu developed it in the 1960s and 1970s. These authors identify three generations of researchers who have used the concept of cultural capital. The first generation understood the concept during the 1970s and early 1980s, within broader traditions of research on mobility, educational stratification, and conflict theory. The second generation from the 1980s to the early 2000s produced three variants of the concept. The third generation has elaborated these variants into three distinct streams. According to Davies and Rizk (2018), a first stream uses survey methods to conceptualize cultural capital as resources that determine student achievement. A second stream uses qualitative observations to interpret cultural capital as familiar strategies that align with the institutional rewards of schools. A third stream offers a more micro-oriented conception of cultural capital as reservoirs of meanings that facilitate ritual interactions.

The following are some examples of studies that have provided evidence on the application of Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital or its overcoming for the analysis of very diverse social realities, during different periods and places in the world, going beyond the classification developed by Davies and Rizk (2018) for educational research in the United States.

For instance, P. L. Andersen and Hansen (2012) found that, within each social class, those with more cultural capital

were also the ones with the higher grades. These inequalities increased along the schooling career and were stronger in oral exams than in written evaluations as they associate higher cultural capital with stronger oral skills. Sullivan (2001) found an unequal distribution of cultural capital, which was influenced by SES and education. Her results supported the idea that cultural capital is transmitted from parents to their offspring as she found that the cultural activities that children engage in are mediated by parental cultural capital and do not experience any school effect. Similarly, Weber and Becker (2019) state that Bourdieu's theory of cultural and social reproduction is their theoretical framework and apply it to the digital domain to identify whether there is social inequality in school-related internet use by European adolescents in terms of consumption (browsing) and productive activities (uploading/sharing). This was a descriptive study using data from the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2012 for the empirical analysis. It was identified that students with parents with higher education and more books at home tend to use the internet more frequently for school-related tasks than students from less-privileged families. This pattern was true for both browsing and sharing school-related internet activities. However, such a pattern is not replicated in the association between parental education and books at home with the frequency of adolescents' use of the internet for entertainment purposes.

In the same vein, Kraaykamp and Van Eijck (2010) found a strong correlation between parental embodied capital and their children's interest in highbrow cultural activities. However, this correlation was mediated by the respondents' own schooling levels and cultural participation, and the correlation between parental cultural capital and that of their children was weaker for younger cohorts. Furthermore, Xu and Hampden-Thompson (2012) argue that Bourdieu's cultural reproduction model better explains the schooling situation in countries with low governmental intervention as the school system is not able to overcome the inequalities between the different SES, either reproducing them or even aggravating them. However, they acknowledge that Bourdieu's model fails to provide a consistent framework to explain the association between children's family background and their performance in welfare states. Kingston (2001) also argues that the cultural capital model fails to explain why higher SES students tend to achieve better in school as it is neither due to exclusive cultural practices nor are these practices rewarded for being associated with the elite.

Nevertheless, other viewpoints, such as that offered by the mobility model, have challenged the Bourdieusian perspective on class and cultural capital. DiMaggio (DiMaggio, 1982; DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985) argues that the influence of cultural capital in the first years is not so determinant. On the contrary, he proposes that those from low social capital households benefit more from cultural capital acquisition than those who already belong in high cultural capital households. Moreover, the mobility model suggests that cultural

capital facilitates interaction beyond social boundaries, rather than narrowing it to the individual's social class.

Consistent with DiMaggio's perspective, Gofen (2009) shows how first-generation higher education students are able to break the intergenerational cycle thanks to their parents' view on education, their relationship with their children, and their family values. Therefore, these first-generation higher education students become an example of cultural mobility. I. G. Andersen and Jæger's (2015) results were also consistent with the mobility model for the three countries in their study. Accordingly, even if they found that the returns to cultural capital considerably vary within the schooling system, they conclude that cultural capital has a positive impact on academic success and that this impact is especially powerful in low-achieving school settings.

Similarly, empirical evidence provided by European research counteracts the Bourdieusian perspective. Aiming at identifying strategies for inclusion and social cohesion, the large-scale European Union (EU)-funded INCLUD-ED project (Flecha, 2015) showed the positive impact on students' educational success, regardless of their SES, as a result of implementing what was defined as Successful Educational Actions (SEA). According to a longitudinal case study in one of the poorest Roma schools in Spain, children achieved outstanding results, reduced school absenteeism, and increased enrolment after implementing those educational actions (Flecha & Soler, 2013). The impact of this study was recognized by *Cambridge Journal of Education* with the Best Paper Prize. Since then, these actions have been replicated across contexts and cultures leading to similar results in very different contexts, including students with disabilities (García-Carrión et al., 2018b). Currently, these SEAs have been implemented in more than 9,000 schools (Spain, Portugal, Cyprus, Malta, Italy, Czech Republic, and United Kingdom; "ENLARGE SEAs. Successful Educational Actions in Europe," n.d.; "Schools as 'Learning Communities,'" n.d.; "SEAs4all—Schools as Learning Communities in Europe," n.d.; "Step4Seas," n.d.) and Latin America (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Peru; "Dialogic Gatherings Latin America," n.d.; "School as Learning Communities in Latam Network," n.d.) achieving outstanding results against all the odds. In Catalonia, the Economy Circle gave the 2017 Education award to "Joaquim Ruyra" elementary school. This illustrates how educational reproduction can be challenged. In a school with 95% of families living in poverty, receiving free school meals, and 92% of immigrant students from 30 nationalities, they achieved "above the average" for the students twice, with the highest scores in all subjects. These achievements are not only for educational success, as measured in standardized tests, but also for the reason these schools improve social cohesion in their communities and contribute to the prevention of violent radicalization (Aiello et al., 2018). In this vein, such research challenges reproductionist theories by demonstrating that SES does not define what individuals can understand or learn in a deterministic way. On the contrary, they

prove that social research-based actions are able to reverse those trends and give all children the chance to develop their potential.

### **Tastes, Preferences, and Skills: Are They Really a Class Matter?**

Going back to *Distinction* (1979), Bourdieu establishes a cultural homology, according to which aesthetic preferences are set by the individual's habitus. Following this idea, high-class children would be socialized in "legitimate culture," in Bourdieu's words, the type of knowledge that seems valid for each individual in the same society from an early age. This socialization gives them more chances to succeed in a school system that values such knowledge. Consequently, the author indicates that highbrow culture becomes the tool for the dominant class to distinguish itself and perpetuate inequalities. Consistent with the culture-class relationship, Gripsrud et al. (2011) found that, between 1998 and 2000, more individuals from higher SES expressed their interest toward highbrow culture, whereas more individuals from lower SES showed preference for lowbrow culture. This is also consistent with Chan and Goldthorpe (2007), who found that the number of inactive cultural consumers of visual arts is greater among low-SES and low-educated individuals.

However, high-SES individuals seem to be broadening their cultural preferences toward the popular culture. Peterson and Kern (1996) confirmed the "omnivorous pattern" for the high-SES individuals in the American society, suggesting that they are more inclined to show an eclectic preference toward cultural consumption. These results have been replicated more recently affecting different forms of cultural consumption in Norway (Gripsrud et al., 2011), Finland (Purhonen et al., 2011), Holland (Van Eijck & Knulst, 2005), and the United Kingdom (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007); however, Chan and Goldthorpe (2007) mention that even if the proportion of omnivores increases with SES, it cannot be asserted that high-SES individuals are mostly omnivores, at least regarding the visual arts.

Looking at these data, it seems obvious that consumption patterns are SES-related to some extent. It is easy to imagine how one's context shapes one's preferences and practices. However, the data show a lesser reproductionist pattern for taste than that of the Bourdieusian theory. All SES groups show an overall interest decline toward traditional "legitimate cultural" forms, especially regarding literature consumption (Gripsrud et al., 2011; Van Eijck & Knulst, 2005). This loss of interest toward "legitimate culture" is stronger not only among low-SES individuals (Gripsrud et al., 2011) but also among younger individuals (Gripsrud et al., 2011; Purhonen et al., 2011; Van Eijck & Knulst, 2005) as the stability in the number of omnivores identified by Van Eijck and Knulst (2005) was caused by a 10% drop in the interest toward highbrow culture among students with higher education. This interest drop toward "legitimate culture" among

individuals from higher SES is also observable in Chan and Goldthorpe (2007), who found that a quarter of the cultural inactives or nonconsumers of visual arts belonged to higher SES. Gripsrud et al. (2011) suggest that this overall interest fall for legitimate culture may be due to the decrease of the relevance of such culture in the students' lives, but it cannot be explained neither by the increase of omnivore consumers, as they did not find a larger amount of omnivores among the younger cohorts; nor by social mobility, as the cohort showing a stronger preference toward highbrow culture was also the cohort with the greatest social mobility.

Nevertheless, according to Purhonen et al. (2011), education, and not SES, better predicts highbrow cultural orientation. This is consistent with humanities students showing higher preferences for "legitimate culture" regardless of their inherited cultural capital (Gripsrud et al., 2011). Besides, "omnivores" are, on average, more educated than "inactives," despite having lower economical capital than them (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007). Similarly, women from all SES backgrounds show a bigger preference toward legitimate culture in music, the visual arts, and literature than men from their same SES (Purhonen et al., 2011).

In addition, some authors argue that only linking highbrow culture to cultural capital does not completely cope with Bourdieu's understanding of this concept. Some argue that it should include the knowledge, skills, and competences that are key for academic achievement (Lareau & Weininger, 2003). Others propose to include stylistic aspects, such as ease and talent, whereas excluding those that are skill-related (P. L. Andersen & Hansen, 2012). However, Kingston (2001) argues that the concept of cultural capital has been expanded to include variables considered advantageous in life, such as working hard, which may have an effect on academic achievement, but cannot systematically be associated with a certain SES, nor are they rewarded for being associated with a particular SES either.

Narrowing our focus to the literary field, even if parental reading promotion fosters reading and greater preference toward quality literature, literary socialization in school correlates with adult literary engagement later on in life (Kraaykamp, 2003). This would again indicate that a successful educational intervention may have stronger effects on cultural capital acquisition than SES. Moreover, the way readings are approached and the extent to which students can relate to the topics they present could have an impact on taste (Garcia Yeste, Gairal Casadó, et al., 2018). Consistent with this idea, the educational intervention of the DLG has shown that highbrow culture can be appreciated and understood by all readers, regardless of their origin, initial educational level, or SES (Soler, 2015).

### **The Dialogic Learning Model**

The Bourdieusian (1979) reproductionist theory centered an individual's potential on his habitus and the perpetuation of



the social differences in the school system. However, considering the analysis on the former sections, this model could be insufficient to analyze today's social and educational context, as it seems to be underestimating the impact of the educational system and the community in overcoming inequalities and democratizing access to "legitimate" knowledge.

Sociological research (Torras-Gómez et al., 2019) shows that, in today's context, more and more people want to have a saying in their community. Information and knowledge are available to all, allowing individuals to question authorities and ask for further explanations, in what Giddens et al. (1994) define as "demonopolization of the expertise." Elster (1998) also identifies a comeback toward participation in collective decision-making by those that are affected by such decisions. Therefore, more people seem to no longer be content by following the rules, but feel they have the right to question them and have a saying in their changing. In this context, dialogue could be the tool to reach consensus and come to agreements.

These dialogic manifestations are progressively observable in more fields, including the educational one. Even if education has traditionally been monologic from teachers to students, only a small part of what an individual can learn or may need happens exclusively in the traditional classroom. On the contrary, all interactions in the different spaces in which a student participates (i.e., school, home, and the street) contribute to his learning process. This is consistent with Bakhtin's (1986) multivoiceness which states that when we interact we bring to the conversation all previous dialogues and meanings that were created in such encounters. Vygotsky, as well, in his sociocultural theory pointed out the dialogic nature of learning when he situated interaction as the means to go beyond the actual learning and reach the potential learning, with language being the tool that allows knowledge acquisition (Vygotsky, 1978). Following this perspective, a successful learning environment should be able to go beyond the school walls and include the diverse voices present in the variety of contexts the student participates in.

Therefore, a communicative approach to education seems to offer a more suitable framework to understand how individuals incorporate cultural capital nowadays. This conception understands learning as an intersubjective process that happens through dialogue (dialogic learning) and, therefore, it determines that an individual builds his own knowledge in interaction with others (Racionero-Plaza & Padrós, 2010). This approach is particularly relevant because of the role it gives to the individual: whereas in reproductionist scenarios low-SES individuals seem to have little to no power to overcome contextual inequalities, the communicative approach makes each person actively responsible for his own transformation and that of the community through dialogue and consensus. In this scenario, the school can no longer be blamed for perpetuating inequalities as all voices are welcomed and considered based on the validity of their arguments, not on their status or power position. Therefore, this approach could

break the dichotomy, dominant–dominated, and offer a more democratic view of education by including in the dialogue those that are normally excluded from it (Gómez et al., 2019). Besides, this model could help understand why those from lower SES can actually benefit from the acquisition of cultural capital, which is both key to personal and social growth and to upward cultural and social mobility.

The dialogic learning model comes from diverse contributions including Freire's critical pedagogy (Ramis, 2018) and relies on seven principles (Flecha, 2000). (a) *Egalitarian dialogue* refers to the fact that arguments are assessed according to validity claims, not power ones. (b) *Cultural intelligence* is the intelligence all individuals develop in life experiences and interactions. (c) *Transformation* results from dialogicity: interaction transforms one's understanding of the world and of others. (d) *Instrumental dimension* regards the acquisition of knowledge and the development of skills used in dialogues. (e) *Creation of meaning* results from the collective interpretation reached by the different participants through consensus. (f) *Solidarity* emerges from the bonds created between participants and the proactive attitudes these interactions foster. (g) *Equality of differences* recognizes the right to be different to all individuals, while sharing the same rights when accessing opportunities.

The findings presented in this theoretical framework lead to at least two conclusions regarding the homology of the habitus (Bourdieu, 1979). On one hand, even if high-SES and high-educational level students are supposed to predict each other, the educational system in welfare states can compensate for background inequalities (Xu & Hampden-Thompson, 2012). For instance, the inclusion of evidence-based educational actions has allowed the academic success of children from minority groups in key instrumental areas such as mathematics (Díez-Palomar et al., 2018) or science (Gairal-Casadó et al., 2019) in school and out-of-school learning settings. Moreover, low-SES students' performance has also been increased through programs aimed at family training (García Yeste, Morlà Folch, & Ionescu, 2018; Renta Davids et al., 2019) and community engagement (García-Carrion et al., 2018a). Hence, this would mean that the "habitus" is not as defining. This is supported by the fact that even if highbrow cultural preference correlates with high SES, it also does so with higher educational levels, suggesting that education can better predict cultural capital than SES. On the other hand, the presented data show that high-SES individuals neither feel as naturally attired nor are they as exposed to "legitimate culture." Actually, it seems that the number of young high-SES individuals with preferences for highbrow culture has declined (Van Eijck & Knulst, 2005) and that a high percentage of high-SES individuals are cultural inactives or nonconsumers (Gripsrud et al., 2011). Therefore, we understand that high-SES students would benefit from an intervention that maximizes their exposure to highbrow culture, allowing them to reflect and draw meaning from it. Moreover, as seen in this section, interaction may be a key component of learning in

today's society. Thus, activities that promote active communicative interaction and are based on the seven principles of dialogic learning should allow individuals to create new meanings and reach higher levels of learning (Racionero-Plaza & Padrós, 2010).

Taking all the above into account, it seems that only providing access to culture is not enough to overcome inequalities or to grant deep cultural knowledge. Thus, a proposal that looks forward to a democratic integration of culture that benefits all students and that allows them to learn from one another is necessary. Consequently, we have presented the dialogic learning model as an alternative that both challenges the Bourdieusian assumptions and offers a new framework of analysis based on the transformative power of interaction. Within this conception, the DLG are examined and discussed through the scientific literature, as an educational and cultural activity that promotes a democratic approach to legitimate culture for all (Flecha, 2015).

## Method

The current research provides an analysis of articles indexed in the scientific databases of SCOPUS and *Journal Citation Reports (JCR)*. Particularly, articles included in this review present the transformative dimension of dialogic learning. Specifically, they provide evidence of how participating in DLG results in the transformation of the educational trajectories of the participants. Thus, the current study can be framed as a meta-ethnography (Noblit & Hare, 1999), in the sense that it provides an explanation of the reality under study based on the experiences recounted by those involved, while allowing a cross-comparison of the different case studies reviewed. For this reason, selected articles include interviews with direct participants in the DLG.

## Inclusion Criteria

Selected articles fulfill the following criteria:

- A focus on DLG, as defined in Flecha (2000)
  - Empirical;
  - Qualitative approach;
  - Inclusion of participants' voices.

## Search Strategy

The Web of Science (WoS) and SCOPUS databases were used to gather relevant contributions in the scientific literature about the DLG. The keywords "dialogic gatherings," "literary gatherings," and "dialogic literary gatherings" were combined in the search. Articles not complying with the inclusion criteria were discarded.

**Selection process.** Retrieved articles underwent a two-step selection process. First, the abstract of all retrieved articles

was read. At this stage, all articles not complying with the inclusion criteria were discarded. Next, articles that had passed the first step were read in full to ensure compliance with all selection criteria. After this two-step process, a total of 15 articles were selected. All articles are of single participant/few participants.

## Analysis

Seven different categories were established for the analysis, one for each of the principles of dialogic learning. The selected articles were then scrutinized to find evidence of the seven principles of dialogic learning (Table 1). The classification of the evidence into the different categories was accepted by all authors.

## DLG

In our society, dialogue becomes the tool to reach consensus and create meaning. In this context, one of the main sources we have to acquire knowledge is reading. However, as Kraaykamp (2003) states, the acquisition of cultural knowledge and skills cannot be achieved by unconnected encounters with literature or culture, but "by intensive and lasting activation of available competencies in a respected social environment" (p. 236). In this context, DLG offer an answer from a dialogic perspective. DLG are based on the understanding that reading is an intersubjective process and focus on dialogue as the tool to collectively unveil the meaning of a text (Flecha, 2015).

Regarding their implementation, DLG begins with participants choosing a work of the best literary creations in universal history. These works include titles from different cultures, such as *The Arabian Nights*, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez, and *Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoevsky, among many other universal literary works. Thereafter, they read at home the agreed upon pages and mark the passages to be discussed. Later, they share such fragments in class and engage in an egalitarian dialogue with their peers in which all voices are welcomed. In such discussion, every individual brings his own cultural intelligence, and new knowledge is collectively created thanks to all contributions (Flecha, 2015).

The intrinsic value of DLG can be explained through the seven principles of dialogic learning. In the following subsections, we will check these principles with DLG experiences in primary schools (Hargreaves & García-Carrión, 2016; Villardón-Gallego et al., 2018), in out-of-home child care (García Yeste, Gairal Casadó, et al., 2018), in adult schools (García Yeste et al., 2017; Racionero-Plaza, 2015; Ruiz, 2015; Serrano et al., 2010), as family training (De Botton et al., 2014; Girbés-Peco et al., 2019; Serradell, 2015), and in penitentiaries (Flecha et al., 2013; Pulido, 2015).

**Table 1.** Summary of Articles.

Participant's name	Age	Context	Characteristics	Ed. level	Location	Reference
Aisha	28	Family training	Moroccan immigrant	Secondary studies	Spain	Serradell (2015)
Alba	11	Primary school	Moroccan student. Intellectual disability. Ordinary class	Sixth grade (4 years behind)	Spain	Molina-Roldán (2015)
Amaya	12	Primary school	Roma student, suffered bullying and exclusion	Sixth grade (low reading/writing)	Spain	Aubert (2015)
Amina	31	Penitentiary	Moroccan prison inmate	No basic studies	Spain	Pulido (2015)
Clara	13	Secondary school (primary during DLG)	Student at a ghetto school. Speaker at the European Parliament	Middle school	Spain	Elboj (2015)
Connor	12	Primary school	Cambridge student	Year 6	United Kingdom	García-Carrión (2015)
Herman	Adult	Penitentiary	Dutch prison inmate	—	Spain	Flecha et al. (2013)
Isabel	Adult	Adult school	Adult learner. +30 years in DLG	No prior academic background	Spain	(Flecha, 2015)
Iñaki	Adult	Penitentiary	Spanish prison inmate	—	Spain	Flecha et al. (2013)
Lola	60	Adult school	Homeless woman	Did not finish secondary education	Spain	Racionero-Plaza (2015)
Manuel	14	Foster center	Foster care Roma male. Son to a negligent father	Secondary	Spain	García Yeste, Gairal-Casadó, et al. (2018)
PI	Adult	Adult school	DLG for adults	—	Spain	Ruiz (2015)
Quilian	14	Foster center	—	Secondary	Spain	García Yeste et al. (2018)
Samuel	Adult	Penitentiary	Spanish prison inmate	—	Spain	Flecha et al. (2013)
Teresa	76	Adult school	Adult learner. +24 years in DLG	No prior academic background	Spain	García Yeste et al. (2017)

Note. DLG = dialogic literary gatherings.

### Equality of Differences

In DLG, high expectations are held for everyone and all participants are encouraged to intervene. Therefore, DLG make it possible for everyone, but especially for the “lesser-academic” to participate in a debate from which they have traditionally been excluded. This is the case for newly literate adults; immigrant or minority mothers and students; homeless people and foster care children, convicts and ex-convicts, and children with intellectual disabilities (Soler, 2015). However, DLG are not only aimed at those with educational needs as they have fostered improvements in schools with a majority of students from higher social and educational backgrounds as well (García-Carrión, 2015; Villardón-Gallego et al., 2018).

By accepting and encouraging heterogeneity, in DLG, participants are given the right to be different from one another while enjoying the same opportunities. This scenario has positive consequences for the individual and the group (Serrano et al., 2010). Single individuals have the opportunity to freely decide to join, to develop their skills, to increase their knowledge, and to feel more integrated. As Amina, an inmate, explains, participating in DLG helped her realize that she was not an outcast, that her contributions mattered,

and that she could aid others (Pulido, 2015). Regarding the group, all members benefit when valid arguments are able to break the stereotypes imposed by society. Aisha, a Moroccan mom, expresses it in her own words: “Before they had, well, an opinion of you, that you’re Muslim, they didn’t realize that you live almost the same as they do, you think the same as they do” (Serradell, 2015, p. 910).

DLG also demonstrate that understanding classical literature is not exclusive to the elite, nor are they the only ones suited to critically think and express their thoughts. Without DLG, Amaya, a Roma girl with low reading and writing skills, and Alba, an immigrant student with intellectual disability, would have probably ended in a support class. For both of them, their right to quality education would have been neglected.

### Egalitarian Dialogue

DLG are based on an egalitarian dialogue, thus everyone is equally considered regardless of their socioeconomic or educational background (Soler, 2015), including the moderator (Hargreaves & García-Carrión, 2016). In this scenario, the arguments presented to the debate are accepted based on validity claims, not power ones (Flecha, 2015). Thanks to

this disposition, participants feel that, in DLG, they can freely think and speak, without worrying about anyone judging them. As Teresa, an older adult DLG participant, puts it, “you feel you have the right to say what you think, and you dare to do so” (García Yeste et al., 2017, p. 195). Moreover, this approach to literature and collective reading has demonstrated to encourage participation. The study carried out by Hargreaves and García-Carrión (2016) shows how the mean participation rate of 10-year-olds in a class setting was 78.5%, with 85% of pupil talk during the sessions and with the teacher assuming an egalitarian role.

Therefore, DLG provide a space in which all individuals are recognized and where shared ideas and experiences are carefully and respectfully listened to, which has an impact on the individual’s self-perception and self-confidence (Racionero-Plaza, 2015). Accordingly, Flecha et al. (2013) express that, thanks to this sense of freedom and of being heard, inmates participating in DLG started to feel like human beings again. Amaya, a Roma student who used to be excluded in school, also began to intervene during DLG as this activity provided her and her classmates with a space in which they all were equal.

Furthermore, the fact that interventions are assessed according to validity claims encourages participants to provide grounded arguments and critically think. Serrano et al. (2010) describe that participants progressively get used to supporting their interventions with arguments. Samuel, an inmate, mentions that in these egalitarian dialogues confronted ideas were debated, leading participants to deep reflections and giving them the opportunity to change their viewpoints. Clara, a secondary student, also shares this feeling, stating that being able to listen to different ways of interpreting an idea allowed her to broaden her mind and understand people’s different opinions.

### **Cultural Intelligence**

Considering cultural intelligence means acknowledging that everyone has something to contribute, not only those with an academic background. As Connor, a U.K. student, portrays it, DLG made him aware that, despite not all his classmates knew everything he talked about, they knew many other things that he was not aware of. This sometimes meant that their view of things was completely different from his own. In this vein, following Bakhtin’s (1986) theory, when participants exchange their understanding, they bring to the debate all their previous interactions and experiences, opening new debates and offering alternative perspectives, which leads to deeper meaning-making processes that could have not been reached individually. This is why in DLG all voices are included because all opinions are necessary to unveil new and hidden interpretations of the text.

Therefore, the more heterogeneous the participants are, the more enriching the dialogue becomes. We can see an example of this in Serrano et al. (2010), who explain how,

while reading Delibes, a participant asked about the word “milana,” the meaning of which he had not found. Thereafter, another participant, who was from the same region as the author, was able to describe the type of bird that a milana is. Hence, thanks to her cultural intelligence and the interaction, the other participants were able to build new knowledge.

### **Creation of Meaning**

As Iñaki, an inmate, explains, during DLG they link the content of the reading with their own lives, reaching new understandings that would not have emerged during individual reading. In this vein, Alba recognizes the value of being able to participate in DLG because she is well aware of how much it has helped her to improve her reading comprehension and how, thanks to it, she is able to understand books that would otherwise be out of reach.

Indeed, reading literary classics, which revolve around timeless issues that have historically concerned mankind, pushes participants to analyze their own trajectories, past and future. Lola, a homeless woman, explains how the exchange of ideas in DLG allowed her to change her vision of her past. Relating with Ulysses’ struggles in *The Odyssey* gave her the strength to want to move forward in life. This is also Amina’s case who, after changing her feeling of not belonging in society, thanks to DLG, is now considering to study. Clara, as well, explains that participating in DLG allowed her to see the kind of people she wants to be around: She now has a very clear idea of the kind of life partner she wants to have in the future.

Therefore, in DLG, participants are well aware of the intrinsic value of literary classics as tools to reflect on their experiences and imagine and work toward any possible future. Just as P1 stated, “As Freire said, more education and reading for people means that we will be freer. We will be even freer if we read the higher quality books written through humanity’s history” (Ruiz, 2015, p. 903). This is probably why Herman, an inmate, thinks that DLG will allow him to leave the prison as a richer man.

### **Instrumental Dimension**

DLG contribute to the development of several competences. Connor mentions how this SEA helped him to deepen his reading comprehension, to improve his writing, and to learn vocabulary and concepts that he later transferred to other settings. Similarly, Serrano et al. (2010) explain how questions around vocabulary decrease with sessions because participants integrate the new words. Besides, the fact that DLG are based on communicative interaction highlights the importance of oral expression and active listening. This has a great impact on students like Amaya who realizes that, thanks to DLG, she can better express herself now; or on Isabel, who now feels able to express her own ideas and thoughts.



Moreover, DLG revolve around literary classics, ensuring that all participants access the knowledge and values these books elicit and increase their cultural knowledge. In addition, they foster participants to learn contextual facts around the book or to extend their learning to other areas. In this vein, Serrano et al. (2010) show that DLG participants gathered in groups outside the sessions to find more information on the discussed topics, or enrolled in courses to learn another language or skill. Connor and Clara explain how DLG had an impact on their performance in other school subjects. Manuel and Quilian, both in a foster center, mention how DLG boosted their interest in books. Therefore, DLG contribute to the acquisition and development of academic skills that are key to school success, allowing students to improve their self-perception and to overcome contextual factors that would have hindered their academic success.

### **Solidarity**

During DLG sessions, discussions about solidarity, empathy, altruism, and social commitment are frequent. In this vein, Villardón-Gallego et al.'s (2018) results confirmed that young students increased their prosocial behavior after participating in DLG, possibly because of the awareness raised around these behaviors in the discussions. This type of behavior can be seen in adults, like Isabel, who explains that DLG pushed her to get involved in different social movements and fight for the inclusion of participants' voices in decision-making about their own education, or Amina, who dreams of becoming a social worker to help others, or in the inmates who participated in DLG in Flecha et al. (2013) and ended up creating a support group, thus transferring the solidarity bonds created during DLG sessions to other spaces in the penitentiary.

Besides, this activity fosters participants to know each other better, which improves their relationships and their attitudes toward certain collectives who were previously unknown to them. In this vein, Connor explains that DLG made some of his classmates, who were not talking to one another, start interacting outside class, creating new friendships. Amaya mentions that, after participating in DLG, some girls in her class started defending her before others, whereas earlier they would turn their back on her. These bonds have now become friendships that prevail outside school. One last example is Aisha's who, after getting involved in DLG, became very active in her neighborhood, supporting and inviting other women to the gatherings, so they would have the chance to learn too.

### **Transformation**

In DLG, participants have the opportunity to transform their lives, thanks to the conditions created by the dialogic learning principles. When engaging in DLG, participants improve their knowledge and skills and develop social values. This

contributes to their personal growth, to the way they interact with others, and to fostering active ways of social participation toward transformation. At a personal level, Alba's and Amaya's stories, among others, show how DLG increase achievement expectations for students with academic needs and positively contribute to their self-esteem and competence. This is also Lola's case who, breaking all stereotypes around homeless women, was able to transform herself through dialogic interactions. Similarly, the self-confidence that Amina got back through participating in DLG has encouraged her to resume her studies and build a new possible future.

DLG have also proven to foster transformation at a collective level. Ruiz (2015), an educator who moderated DLG, describes how this activity transformed her vision of the literary classics. Moreover, she mentions how the issues discussed around the books promoted participants' involvement in changing their neighborhood. Similarly, educators in the penitentiary center started to see inmates differently, because they were reading the literary classics, transforming the way they related to them. This gave the inmates the possibility to see themselves in a new perspective and imagine a different future (Flecha et al., 2013). Taking a look at the participants' households, De Botton et al. (2014) observed that Moroccan moms participating in their study explained that topics discussed during dinner at home became culturally richer after they started participating in DLG. This, in turn, changed the way in which their children saw them now, as more empowered individuals. Connor also explains that now he reads more with his mother, which has increased his brother's motivation toward reading. Regarding the classroom setting, Hargreaves and García-Carrión (2016) suggest that DLG transform classroom interactions, fostering participation and the exchange of ideas. Therefore, these experiences demonstrate how DLG empower participants and show them that other realities are possible. This allows them to overcome inequalities and freely decide who they want to be.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

In this article, we have attempted to question the Bourdieusian reproductionist theory (Bourdieu, 1979; Bourdieu, & Passeron, 1970) and its difficulties to describe the sociocultural context of the 21st century. Thus, through a literature review, we have challenged the concept of habitus and the relationship between taste, cultural capital, and social class, focusing on the transformative power of the dialogic model of education (Flecha, 2000). In this scenario, we have pointed out how an SEA such as DLG can contribute to overcoming the negative contextual characteristics that students may encounter and explain cultural mobility. DLG show how interaction on an egalitarian basis around high-quality texts has great transformative power for the individuals participating in them and their community.

The dialogic principles on which DLG are based lead to overcoming the conception that cultural preferences are determined by social class and cultural background (Bourdieu, 1979). Bourdieu's concept of "habitus" cannot explain how adults with low levels of education or children from socially and culturally disadvantaged environments enjoy reading and dialoguing with some of the best literary creations. DLG are an educational action that reverses the assertion that such literature can only be the exclusive privilege of the elite. In Bourdieu's terms, the cultural capital and social capital of people who participate in DLG grow exponentially. In doing so, DLG contribute to crossing the boundaries that label social classes culturally. Regardless of the socioeconomic background of the participants, DLG overturn the habitus transmitted in their social and family context in which they have been socialized.

DLG affect the transformation of the embodied state and the objectified state of cultural capital. These are not only contributing to accessing the institutionalized state of cultural capital, but are also creating new knowledge and meaning. Examples, such as the immigrant mothers of Moroccan origin who are participating in DLG and leading conversations about the books they read at dinner time with their families or the children from low socioeconomic backgrounds who through DLG are improving their competences in text comprehension, oral and written communication, and, as a consequence, improving their educational achievement, show this. The reviewed articles published in indexed peer review journals on DLG are providing evidence of how the structuralist equation that correlates low social class with low cultural capital and worse educational performance than those of higher social class is being reversed, in line with previous studies (I. G. Andersen & Jæger, 2015; DiMaggio, 1982; DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985; Gofen, 2009; Kingston, 2001).

The evidence gathered in the qualitative studies reviewed shows how the creation of meaning in the dialogic interactions that take place in the DLG has promoted a preference and taste for great literary creations. Thanks to the DLG, women who have just become literate, adults who have lived through processes of social exclusion that have led them to live on the streets or go to prison, and children from socioeconomically disadvantaged families now read and enjoy literature that was considered to be aimed at the social elites.

Therefore, we have argued that DLG prove that individuals from all SES backgrounds are capable of not only enjoying reference works of universal literature, but also relating their life experiences to the stories told in them and to later share their reflections, listen to those of others, and create new meanings. Moreover, the impact that DLG generate does not only strike them individually, contributing to their cultural capital, their social and communicative skills, and their values, but also their entourage. Family and community members of those participating in DLG benefit from the culture and knowledge that is shared and created in them, as well as from the solidarity attitudes that it promotes (Soler,

2015). Gripsrud et al. (2011) implied that the overall decline in interest for "legitimate culture" could be due to a decrease of the relevance of such culture in the students' lives. However, we have argued that a dialogic approach to literature ensures meaningful and consistent exposure to such culture to participants of all kinds as it shows them how the issues covered in literary classics are actually close to those in their personal experiences and in the life of others. Students, all of them regardless of their social class, have the power to learn, create, contribute, and transform, and reading the greatest literary creations dialogically elicits the knowledge and attitudes toward such transformation.

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### ORCID iDs

Elisabeth Torras-Gómez  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5021-4881>

Laura Ruiz-Eugenio  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2262-1663>

Elena Duque  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6444-1997>

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